

Tatnia nearly jumped out of her seat at Miru's statement, her face reddened with anger. Before she could say anything stupid and potentially hurt her relationship with Miru, I snapped a crackle of electricity at her. It was only a split-second long cast of the sparks spell, which I only cast at a third of its usual strength. It was an interesting trick I was only just starting to learn with some of the spells that took a continuous drain of magic.

The zap hit her in the leg, causing it to spasm slightly and keep her in her chair. From experience, I knew it hurt, but it felt like one of those tennis racket bug zappers through clothes. Her anger was immediately redirected at me, but I knew I could take it.

"We would free them immediately, maybe even give them a few hundred credits to get them off the planet," I said, giving Tatnia a look before looking back at Miru. "You can disable slave implants, right?"

"Yeah, I can," Miru confirmed with a nod and a smile. "That wouldn't take long, though I would need a few tools. But the point would be to get the credit ingots into whatever stash the market would have."

"Which Deacon would be able to track," Nal finished, nodding in agreement. "That is a sound plan."

Tatnia, who was now looking a little embarrassed for being so upset, nodded in agreement. She was still rubbing her leg, though, and giving me an annoyed look.

"One question... how much does a slave cost?" I asked, getting awkward looks from everyone else.

"I am happy to say I have no idea," Nal answered. "But that information can be found on the holonet."

We spent the rest of the day planning the purchase, and subsequent freeing, of a slave. We started by selecting a more high-end slave market, as we wanted to ensure that the credits we were spending, around three thousand for a single slave, would be recouped when we robbed the credit transfer speeder. As grim as it was, we wouldn't get anywhere if we spent more money than we made.

Miru made a list of tools for Nal, who flew off the speeder bike to purchase everything she needed to disable a slave chip. The list basically boiled down to more tools used for fine-tuning electronic work. With our target selected and everyone prepared, we went to sleep with a nervous energy that ended up keeping everyone up a bit later than we would have liked.

The following day, I was dropped off at a street corner with a big bag of credit ingots, several hours away from our temporary base. A taxi was already on its way while the rest of the

crew moved into position around the slave market, finding alleyways and rooftops to idle on, waiting to hear if I needed an emergency pick-up.

The taxi arrived, picked me up, and dropped me off at the front entrance of the slave market. It was a large compound with a singular central building and several smaller buildings around it. In all honesty, the building complex looked nice, with smooth, clean lines and the occasional shrubbery or flower garden to break up the permacrete monopoly. Everything was clean and well maintained, with none of the grime that seemed to accumulate in every corner of this planet. It was disquieting, like walking into a serial killer's home and finding out they had the same taste in decor as you.

As I stepped into the compound, I could almost feel the darkness, the despair that permeated the air. It wasn't until I was well inside the complex that I realized that between where I was and the ever-present force... I might actually be feeling the despair of the victims of this disgusting place. I paused for a moment, under the guise of looking at a plant, really just fighting the urge to burn the place to the ground.

As I walked deeper, I spotted plenty of patrolling guards armed to the teeth. These weren't glorified street thugs. They walked with purpose and discipline that spoke of some serious training and wore some impressive-looking armor. There were even several weapons platforms stationed around the perimeter, each one topped with a blaster cannon with a similar size to the one on the A-A5. The guards kept an eye out and in, seemingly charged with keeping dangerous stuff out, as well as the slaves from escaping.

I headed into the main building, doing my best to focus on the mission. After a quick conversation with someone behind the front counter of the main building, I was led into a series of rooms, each with a handful of slaves. The entire experience was disgusting, a horrendous combination of being sold a car and a pet. It took everything that I had not to do anything, not start through electricity and fire around like a madman. I couldn't start down that path, not yet, at least. But someday, that would change. Eventually, I would fix this, even if I had to kill every slaver myself.

In the end, I settled on a Zabrak male, purchasing him for two thousand seven hundred credits, nearly emptying the satchel of credit ingots I had brought with me. He was tall, with a smooth, horned head and tattooed face that his species was known for. His skin was a bit greyer than was normal for a human, but the salesperson assured me that was normal. He responded to my orders with an utterly blank face, following behind me as the salesperson described how his implant worked.

"There are three safety triggers, the first being a simple shock. Use it as a deterrent or a punishment. The second will render the slave unconscious, which they won't wake from for eight hours. Be sure it will not hurt itself by falling. The third will kill the slave. You will have to repeat that command three times before activating. There are no refunds for accidental termination."

They went through the process of locking his implant to my voice and even threw in a new, clean outfit for the poor bastard. Throughout the entire time, the man was silent, the movement in his pale blue eyes the only sign that there was any sort of intelligence at all.

I left the slave market an hour after I entered. I was tired and disgusted with myself and the monsters I had just shaken hands with. After a five-minute wait, a speeder taxi landed near the entrance, and Jorlor followed me in, sitting in one corner of the parallel seats as far away from me as he could get.

The droid-piloted speeder lifted off the ground with the familiar hum of repulsorlifts, taking us away from the shiny, polished pit of despair. We were in the air for a few minutes when the Zabrackian finally said something.

“You were robbed,” He said, looking directly at me. “I will never follow your orders, not properly, at least. I will dedicate everything to sabotaging your life as best as I can. I suggest not eating anything I make and not trusting anything I do because I will not stop trying to kill you. The ones who sold me like a piece of nerf meat knew this. They knew you were buying a death sentence.”

I looked at him, his face finally showing emotion. Just one. Complete and utter defiance. Unbroken and strong, this was a man who would never surrender to being a slave.

“Why hasn’t anyone killed you yet?” I asked, watching him closely.

“Can’t get your money back if my head is a pulped mess,” He explained with a shrug. “They just knock me out, rough me up, and send me back.”

“How many times has that happened?” I asked before adding another question. “How long have you been a slave?”

“Seven months and twice before. The second time I almost killed my owner,” he said, all but spitting out the last word. “Who knows, maybe the third time really is the charm.”

I could only shrug at his suggestion, doing my best to relax just a few feet away from a man who would probably gladly kill me with his bare hands, even if he died in the process. I had planned on releasing his binders at some point, but for my own safety, until everything could be explained, it was probably best to keep them.

Eventually, the taxi landed on a seemingly random street corner. The Zabrackian stepped out of the speeder first. I was a bit worried that he would try and run before I realized he wouldn’t, not before he had a chance to kill me. Silently we stood at the street corner until Tatnia landed the A-A5 next to us, the door popping open.

"After you," I said, gesturing to the doorway into the cargo space.

When he didn't move, I shook my head, wondering how I would do this. I could knock him out with a command and would if he fought too much, but I would rather not stoop to that level. Just having the ability to torture this person with a simple word made me feel gross. Eventually, I settled on the lesser of two evils. I hid my hand in my jacket sleeve, charged up a calm spell, and shot it at him, hitting him in the chest. He looked surprised for a moment before his whole body relaxed.

"What is your name?" I asked, the much calmer alien looking at me with a blank face.

"Nevue Loc," He said. "What is yours?"

"Deacon Roy," I answered with a smile. "Could you do me a favor and get in the back of this speeder? I promise we aren't going to hurt you. In fact, I think you will be happy with how this all ends."

"Alright, I guess I'll trust you for now," He said in a soft, tired voice, climbing into the cargo space. "Should I sit down?"

"That's a great idea, go ahead and sit down," I said, watching as the Zabrak did so, before looking through the cockpit door at Tatnia and Miru. "You guys seal that door, just in case. I have him calmed for now, but my illusion work is—"

"What... what was that?" Nevue asked, shaking his head and looking around before settling on me. "Did you hit me with some sort of stun blast? Did you drug me?"

"-Spotty at best."

The cockpit door sealed shut, and I finished closing the entrance to the cargo space, the A-A5 lifting off into the air soon after, heading to our temporary home.

"Yes, it was a kind of pacifying ray, just keeps people from freaking out," I lied, dropping into one of the benches.

"What is going on?" he asked, looking around. "What's with the speeder shuffle?"

"We didn't want anyone near the market getting a look at this speeder," I explained. "It's probably futile at this point but still. They might not have let me in if they saw it."

By now, Nevue was starting to get visibly worried about his current predicament, frantically looking around, trying to spot an out or a solution to his problem. His eyes settle on the blaster rifles stacked on the walls, his eyes going wide.

“Ah fuck, should have seen that coming,” I curse. “Now, Nevue, please don’t-”

The still handcuffed man jumped up from his seat, going straight for the blaster rifles. Before he could even get halfway, I shouted the knockout passphrase, “Slumber.” He collapsed, landing on the angled part of the back wall, just under the blaster rifles. I winced as he hit the floor roughly, thankful that he didn’t crack his head open. I let out a sigh and made my way over, laying him down on the floor in a more comfortable position before sitting back down.

We landed a few hours later, quietly settling down in the secluded landing pad. We quickly covered the speeder with a tarp, set up a bed for Nevue, and let Miru do her work. She scanned his body and located the implant immediately.

“On his brain stem? Miru, are you sure that’s safe to pull out?” I asked. “I don’t know Twi’lek, or Zabrak biology very well, but that’s kind of an important and sensitive part of a human’s anatomy. You can’t just go hacking at it with your tools.”

“Who said anything about hacking at anything with tools?” She asked, looking at me like I was crazy. “The main component of the implant is removable. All the fiddly bits connected to his nerves will stay behind. You can get it removed, but it’s not necessary. I still have mine. Think of it as a mount for the dangerous computer bit. You leave the mount alone and pull out the part that will explode on command. Trust me, it’s simple.”

True to her word, it did seem shockingly simple. Using a vibroknife I sterilized with flames, Miru sliced into Jorlor’s neck, exposing an implant the size of a nickel. She did some computer stuff, with Tatnia occasionally flushing the incision with water. Eventually, she was satisfied and put down her tools, picked up a pair of pliers, and pulled out the implant with a twist.

As she put it on her toolbox, I could see that there was still some stuff inside his neck, but the majority of it was now removed. Tatnia gave it one last rinse before using some things from a first aid kit to seal up the incision, finishing up by putting some sort of bacta patch on it.

In all, the process took ten minutes. When she was done, Miru let out a long breath.

“Wooh, that was intense,” She said, sweating slightly. “This was a newer model. It almost went off twice!”

“Jesus Miru... how close did we get to his head exploding in our faces?” I asked, giving the young techie a look.

“No comment!”

I glared at the young Twi’lek before shaking my head with a long sigh. With Nevue set for now, and the credit ingots sitting somewhere in the slave market, everyone sat down and relaxed a bit. I described how revolting the market was.

At some point, Nal pointed out it might be worth checking out the location of the credit ingots, even if they hadn't been away long if nothing else than to test if it worked. We spent about ten minutes scanning for the twenty credit ingots that we had personalized and that I had recorded on a data pad. Nineteen of the ingots seemed to be in the same spot, the arrow pointing in the direction of the market, while one was pointed off in a totally different direction. We quickly realized that they must have used that ingot for something, and it was now out in the wild somewhere.

I continued to scan the ingots every fifteen minutes or so, making sure that we didn't lose any more of them out into the public. About five hours after we arrived, Nevue started to stir, shifting in the bed before eventually bolting upright, looking around wildly. When he spotted us all sitting nearby, eating our dinners, he rolled out of bed and stood up quickly. After a moment, he noticed that he wasn't wearing binders anymore, and he looked down at his wrists in confusion.

"What... what is going on?" he asked, raising his hand to rub his neck, finding the bandage there. "What..."

"I took out your implant," Miru explained with a smile. "It's actually over there with my tools."

The maybe twenty-five-year-old alien looked around to where she was pointing, spotting the small coin-sized implant on top of her toolbox. His eyes widened, seemingly having recognized it on site.

"How? Why? What the frink is going on?" He asked, looking between all of us wildly. "Did... did you really remove it?"

"We did. We have no interest in owning a slave," Nal explained before holding out a prepackaged dinner. "Come, you must be hungry. Eat, and we will explain."

He stood there, staring at us for a long moment. He looked back to the implant, still feeling his bandaged neck. Eventually, having made up his mind, he walked forward and took the food from the Duros, sitting down next to him.

"Right! Well, I guess we start at the beginning, then?" I suggested, Miru and Tatnia both nodding in agreement. "Nal, Tatnia, and I arrived here just about a week ago, locked up in the cells of a slave ship...."